

The Invaders...



## *The Fortress...*

Iwo Jima's eight square miles of volcanic ash and natural caves became a war machine with one mission: defense.

Mt. Suribachi, the 550-foot volcanic cone at the island's southern tip, dominates both possible landing beaches. From here, Japanese gunners zeroed in on every inch of landing approach.

Blockhouses and pillboxes flanked the landing areas. Within, more heavy weapons stood ready to blast the attacking Marines.

Machine guns criss-crossed the beaches with deadly interlocking fire. Rockets, anti-boat and antitank guns were also trained on the beaches.

The Japanese were ready.





The Marines slated to make the assault were the 3d, 4th and 5th Divisions. Major General Graves B. Erskine commanded the 3d; Major General Clifton B. Cates (later Commandant), the 4th; and Major General Keller E. Rockey, the 5th.

These divisions comprised the largest force of Marines fielded in World War II—the V Amphibious Corps. The Corps Commander was Major General Harry Schmidt, USMC, a veteran of the Marshalls and Marianas campaigns.

The pork chop-shaped island was blasted with the most intensive air and naval bombardment ever thrown against a Pacific objective.





The first strikes against Iwo were concurrent with the June, 1944, landing on Saipan. Carrier air hit the Japanese airfields on Iwo to keep their planes from opposing the Marianas landings.

Throughout the later summer and winter, the defenders of Iwo Jima were subjected to frequent air and naval gunfire raids. Carrier aircraft, B-24s and later B-29s rained tons of ordnance on Iwo targets. U.S. Navy cruisers and battleships began their attacks in early November.

While the air and naval attacks tore at the Japanese positions above the ground, hardly any of the underground fortifications were touched. In the end, it was the individual Marine, his rifle and guts, that conquered the Japanese bastion.

